Chapter 3
The Noun Phrase

Abstract Chapter 2 introduced the basic definition of a noun as a person, place, or thing. In this chapter, we will examine in more detail what constitutes the word class *noun* to expand our understanding of what exactly a noun encompasses. We will also discuss different types of nouns and various noun signals that can help to identify which words are functioning as nouns. The chapter is divided into four parts. Section 3.1 discusses identifying nouns. Section 3.2 examines different types of nouns. Section 3.3 considers some of the structure classes that signal nouns; and Sect. 3.4 reviews pronouns, words that substitute for nouns.

Keywords count noun · non-count noun · crossover noun · demonstratives · quantifiers · pronouns

3.1 Section 1: Identifying Nouns

In English, identifying the class membership of content words is not always easy because form is not always equal to function. In Chap. 2, for instance, we saw that some words fit into more than one class. We review this concept by looking at the two sentences below with the word *harm*.

The *harm* was minimal.	noun
The drug *harmed* more than it helped.	verb

In the first sentence, *harm* is a noun referring to a thing. In the second sentence, *harm* is a verb referring to an action. These two different functions of *harm* are indicated by structural clues that can be analyzed as follows:

- In first sentence, *harm* follows the noun signal *the* and comes before the verb *was. Harm* is in what we call **subject** position.
- In the second sentence, *The drug* is now in subject position, before *harm,* which is now in verb position.

Many words are like *harm* in that they belong to more than one word class. There are other words that belong only to one word class but may take on other functions.

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The words *rich* and *poor,* for instance, are words that fit our definition in Chap. 2 of a descriptive word or an adjective:

Plants grow in *rich* soil.
Plants don't grow in *poor* soil.

In these two sentences the adjectives *rich* and *poor* describe the noun *soil*. They tell us in what kind of soil plants grow or do not grow. In the next two sentences *rich* and *poor* are still adjectives, but they are functioning differently:

The *rich* have a good life.
The *poor* have a hard life.

Here the adjectives *rich* and *poor* are in the sentence position where we normally expect a noun (to the left of the verb). They are functioning as nouns and as the subjects of the verb *have*.

As these six sentences illustrate, in English, membership in a particular word class does not automatically determine grammatical function because the same form may have different functions. Remember, form is not necessarily equal to function.

What clues are there to help identify nouns?

3.1.1 Semantic Clues

When we say that we use semantic clues to help us identify the function of a word, we mean that the meaning of a word itself provides a clue to its use. The standard definition of a noun as a person, place, or thing is what is called a *semantic* definition because it categorizes words by what they mean.

When we categorize words by what they mean, we consider the semantic properties that they have in common. *Astronaut* and *firefighter* are classified as nouns because they refer to people. *City* and *New York* are classified as nouns because they refer to places, and *plant* and *lamp* are classified as nouns because they refer to things. In other words, certain types of words can be grouped or classed together because they have shared intrinsic meanings. In Chap. 2 in Discovery Activity 1, you were able to group different words together without necessarily knowing the names of different word classes. There were certain inherent properties or characteristics in the different words that allowed you to place them together in specific groups. Words such as *listen, speak,* and *sit* all carry the idea of some type of action. Words such as *bird, tree*, and *pencil* bring to mind a concrete object or thing.

Words that carry core semantic properties are called *prototypical* words. The word *bird* for most people conjures up an image of a creature with a beak, wings, and feathers that has the ability to fly. This is a prototypical bird, regardless of whether a person's exact mental image is of a robin, crow, cardinal, or parrot. The word *bird*, however, encompasses a vast number of birds that do not necessarily share all these avian features (e.g., ostriches or penguins do not have the ability to fly). Ostriches and penguins are still birds, just not prototypical examples of birds.

While native speakers and highly proficient non-native speakers may be able to rely on semantic clues in classifying words as nouns, this is generally not the case for

ESL/EFL learners—especially if their language is unrelated to English—and they must rely on other clues to help them determine which words are functioning as nouns.

What other clues are there for helping us to identify nouns?

There are three other types of clues we can use to help us identify nouns: structural ones, which we will introduce here briefly and discuss later in Sect. 3.3, and derivational and morphological clues, to which you were introduced in Chap. 2.

3.1.2 Structural Clues

Another way to identify word function is to consider structural clues, such as sentence position, and the co-occurrence of other words. For example, nouns characteristically occur after articles such as *the*:

the book
the water
the computer

Such structural clues help us identify the class membership of words that look identical but occupy different functions in a sentence:

I drank the *water*.
I *water* the plants.

In the first sentence, *water* is preceded by *the,* a structural clue indicating that water is functioning as a noun. In the second sentence, *water* occurs after the subject pronoun *I*. The placement of *water* in this sentence occurs where we normally expect an action word or verb, namely before (or to the right of) the subject. Such a structural analysis allows us to account for and understand the (occasional) use of adjectives as nouns in the sentences we saw earlier:

The *rich* have a good life.
The *poor* have a hard life.

The structural clues in these two examples indicate that the adjectives are functioning as nouns here. Neither adjective, however, has changed class membership; *poor* and *rich* remain adjectives.

In Sect. 3.3 of this chapter we will examine structural clues in greater detail.

3.1.3 Morphological Clues

3.1.3.1 Derivational Clues

In Chap. 2, we saw how certain derivational suffixes provide us with clues to identifying class membership. We saw, for instance, that the suffix *–ment* generally signals nouns, such as *amazement, settlement,* or *movement*.

3.1.3.2 Inflectional Clues

Also in Chap. 2, you were introduced to inflectional endings. One of these was the *–s* inflection to indicate a regular plural noun as in *book**s**, pencil**s**, pen**s***, and *folder**s***. There is also the possessive *'s* (sometimes referred to as the *genitive case)* as in *Justin**'s** car, cat**'s** whiskers,* and *girl**'s** jacket*.

Thus, words that are plural or take the possessive *'s* provide morphological clues in identifying them as nouns. Although this is helpful, not all nouns can form the plural, nor can all nouns can take the possessive *'s* inflection. In addition, a concern for ESL/EFL learners is how to distinguish the plural *–s* from the 3rd person singular present *–s,* particularly as they are pronounced identically. Finally, as we discuss below, not all nouns can take the possessive *'s* inflection.

What exactly does the possessive* 's *inflection tell us?

3.1.3.3 Possessive *'s*

Traditional definitions of possessive *'s* define this inflectional ending as something added to certain nouns to show possession or ownership. In reality, the *'s* indicates more than possession or ownership. It can also convey the meaning of originator or inventor as in:

Darwin**'s** theory of evolution
Edison**'s** light bulb
Stephen King**'s** novels

Possessive *'s* can also describe something related to a characteristic as in:

the soldier**'s** courage
the killer**'s** obsession

It can also be a description in itself as in:

children**'s** literature
the women**'s** movement

***Can all nouns can take the possessive* 's?**

Not all nouns can take the possessive *'s*. Nouns that can take the possessive *'s* are generally those referring to:

- people
- time
- animals
- collective nouns

Nouns that generally do not take the possessive *'s* are **inanimate** nouns, although there are certain inanimate nouns that do take the possessive *'s*. These are generally collective nouns that refer to groups of people such as *company, team, committee*, or *government*.

Most inanimate nouns take *of* phrases to show possession, as in *the back of the desk* and not **the desk's back.* Like many other examples in English that we will see, there are many exceptions to this "rule." We say, for instance, *the book's cover*, although you can also use an *of* phrase here.

While ESL/EFL learners may want to know exactly when they can or cannot use the possessive *'s*, there is no hard and fast rule for them to follow, only general guidelines. When ESL/EFL learners do use the possessive *'s* where native speakers would not, such errors are not serious. They generally do not cause misunderstandings and are rarely stigmatized by native speakers.

At this point we leave our brief overview of clues for identifying words as nouns, and turn to Sect. 3.2 to explore the different types of nouns.

3.2 Section 2: Count, Non-Count, and Crossover Nouns

***Why can we say* an animal *but not* an advice?**

One way to classify nouns is by categorizing them as *count* or *non-count* nouns. Simply put, count nouns refer to those nouns that can be counted and non-count nouns to those that cannot be counted.

3.2.1 Count Nouns

Count nouns have both singular and plural forms, for example, *animal, animals*, or *book, books*. Plural count nouns take a plural verb and are replaced with plural pronouns:

Books are interesting. → *They* are interesting.
Some *animals* livein the wild. → *They* livein the wild.

Only count nouns have plural forms. The regular plural is the *–s* inflection attached to the end of the count nouns, although there are a few exceptions. A number of irregular nouns change the internal vowel, add irregular plural endings, or undergo other spelling changes. There are also count nouns that do not have plural forms, such as *1 sheep, 2 sheep,* or *10 deer, 15 deer.* Some nouns always end in *s* but are not plural as in *series* or *genius*.

Examples: Irregular Plurals						
irregular plural ending		**vowel change**		**f → ves**		**no change**
basis	bas**es**	child	children	leaf	leaves	sheep
phenomeno**n**	phenomen**a**	foot	feet	wife	wives	aircraft
syllabus	syllab**i**	mouse	mice	shelf	shelves	series

Many irregular nouns are nouns that have been borrowed from Latin or Greek and take the Latin or Greek plural formation. Over time, there has been a tendency for these nouns to adopt the regular English plural *–s* inflection. Therefore, we see words such as *syllabus* that have two plural forms, the original *syllabi* and the English *syllabuses*.

Since irregular nouns are limited exceptions, they are not difficult very difficult for ESL/EFL learners. At times, learners may generalize the plural *–s* inflection and produce words such as **childrens*.

Try Discovery Activity 1 to see how much you know about plural nouns and nouns ending in *s*. Check your answers in a dictionary if you are not sure of a word.

Discovery Activity 1: Nouns and *s*

1. Look at the following list of words.
2. Identify which nouns are plural and which ones are nouns that simply end in *s*.
   Example:

linguistics	noun that ends in *s*
fans	plural word

genius	chess	jeans	news
clothes	parts	fans	alias
admirers	scissors	syllabus	summons

Discussion: Discovery Activity 1

As this Discovery Activity illustrates, not all nouns that end in *s* are plural. Words such as *jeans, clothes,* and *scissors* are nouns with only plural forms; other words such as *genius* and *syllabus* simply end in *s* with no plural meaning attached to the *s*. Since there are relatively few nouns that follow this pattern, it is not difficult for learners of English to become familiar with the most common of these and to use them correctly.

3.2.2 Non-Count Nouns

Non-count nouns refer to things we cannot count, such as abstract concepts, general nouns, or units. We will look shortly at the types of non-count nouns in greater depth, but for now, we will use this very general definition.

Non-count nouns have only one noun form, for example, *relaxation* but not **relaxations*; *rice* but not **rices*. Because non-count nouns cannot be counted, they do not occur with *a/an* or precise numbers, such as *two, three,* etc. Non-count nouns always take a singular verb because there is no plural form and are replaced by a singular pronoun.

Advice *is* helpful. → **It** *is* useful.

Look at the box below to help clarify the difference between count and non-count nouns. If you look at the words in the left-hand column, you will notice that you can add a number before each one. You can also add the inflectional *–s* plural ending. If you look at the right-hand column, you will see that you can't add any numbers or the plural *–s* inflection (e.g., we can't say **three advices).*

Count Nouns	**Non-Count Nouns**
cookie	advice
answer	information
letter	air
wall	input
map	weather
drawer	harm
calendar	recreation

In Discovery Activity 2, see how well you can distinguish between count and non-count nouns. For this activity, the answers are not provided because you can check the words in a dictionary. If there is no plural form given, it is a non-count noun.

Discovery Activity 2: Count Versus Non-Count Nouns

Look at the words below.

1. If the word is a count noun, label it **C.**
2. If the word a non-count noun, label it **NC.**

Examples:

cat **C** happiness **NC**

carrot	knowledge	garbage
chalk	anger	scanner
muscle	blog	health
soap	raindrop	sadness

What about* a loaf of bread *or* a slice of bread*? Aren't these count nouns?

The non-count noun *bread* is still a non-count noun. What has happened is that we have added a quantifying phrase, *a loaf* or *a slice,* before the non-count noun *bread*.

Many non-count nouns can be quantified, that is, made countable by adding certain phrases before them: ***a grain of*** *sand,* ***three bottles of*** *water,* ***a piece of*** *advice*. When one of these phrases comes before a noun, we call the entire group of words a noun phrase.

Phrase	**+**	**Noun**	**=**	**Noun Phrase**
a or *the* bit of		information		*a* or *the* bit of information
a or *the* loaf of		bread		*a* or *the* loaf of bread
a or *the* piece of		cheese		*a* or *the* piece of cheese

In Discovery Activity 3, try adding an appropriate quantifying phrase to the non-count nouns. For most of the non-count nouns in this Discovery Activity, you will find that there is more than one possibility. You can compare your answers with those in the Answer Key.

Discovery Activity 3: Adding Quantifying Phrases to Non-Count Nouns

Provide at least one quantifying phrase that you can use with each non-count noun below.

Example:

bread: a slice of a loaf of a piece of

1. ham
2. paper
3. butter
4. water
5. hair
6. wisdom
7. intelligence
8. grass

Is there any way to classify or categorize different types of non-count nouns?

3.2.2.1 Subcategories of Non-Count Nouns

In looking at the non-count nouns in Discovery Activity 3, you will notice that they refer to different types of non-count nouns. *Wisdom,* for instance, is something we refer to as an abstract concept. *Water,* on the other hand, is a liquid. To help

ESL/EFL learners understand non-count nouns, we generally classify them into three major different subcategories: **abstract, mass,** and **collective nouns**.

What is the difference between an* abstract, mass*, or* collective *noun?

Mass nouns include those nouns that cannot be counted and that refer to larger units or categories. These include nouns such as *furniture, cheese*, or *grass*. The noun *furniture,* for instance, is the larger unit or category including items such as tables, chairs, sofas, beds, and similar items. Mass nouns are also nouns that refer to undifferentiated substances such as liquids, gases, and solids like *water*, *oil*, and *bread*.

Abstract nouns are nouns that refer to ideas, concepts, emotions, beliefs, precepts, or intangible phenomena such as *intelligence, hate, fear,* and *honesty*. These cannot be counted because they do not refer to anything that has substance or that we can touch.

Collective nouns include words that refer to sets or groups, such as *audience, press, committee*, or *faculty. Audience* or *faculty* can be thought of as a set, for instance, because each word refers to a group of persons or individuals.

In American English, collective nouns generally take a singular verb, but in British English they take a plural verb.

Collective Nouns	
American English	**British English**
The committee *meets* at 10 a.m.	The committee *meet* at 10 a.m.
The *press has* become intrusive.	The *press have* become intrusive.

3.2.2.2 Structure Words and Non-Count Nouns

Different structure words signal different types of nouns. Count nouns can occur alone or with determiners, such as articles (*the, a,* or *an*) and expressions (e.g., *a few, several, some*). Non-count nouns can be preceded by noun signal phrases that are countable (e.g., ***a slice of*** *bread,* ***a ball of*** *yarn,* or ***a quart of*** *oil).*

Look at the chart below to see how the count noun *animal* takes different noun signals than the non-count noun *advice.*

Structure Words Accompanying Nouns: Animal (Count) Versus Advice (Non-Count)			
animal		**advice**	
an animal **the** animal	*an, the*	**the** advice	only *the* (no *an*)
animal**s**	plural *–s*		no plural form
this animal **that** animal	*this, that*	**this** advice **that** advice	only *this, that* (no *these, those*)
these animals **those** animals	*these, those*		
many animals	*many*	**much** advice	*much*
a few animals **few** animals	*a few, few*	**a little** advice **little** advice	*a little, little*
three animals	exact number		no numbers

As you can see, count and non-count words are preceded by different structure words. Because knowledge of count and non-count nouns is part of their innate grammar, native speakers automatically know which structure words go with which type of noun. ESL/EFL learners, in contrast, must learn both what count and non-count nouns are and which structure words accompany which type of noun. We will look at this more closely in Sect. 3.3.

Do ESL/EFL learners have difficulty understanding when a noun is "countable"?

- ***Learner difficulties***

Native speakers are generally not consciously aware of the distinction between count and non-count nouns but, for ESL/EFL learners, this can be a difficult concept. For one, conceptualizing which nouns are count or non-count is difficult for speakers whose native languages have different ways of looking at nouns. In some languages, nouns are categorized according to whether they are animate or inanimate; in other languages, nouns are categorized according to shape and size. In many languages, nouns are not categorized at all.

For some ESL/EFL learners, using phrases such as *a bit of* or *a piece of* make a non-count noun countable in their minds. Other ESL/EFL learners conceptualize a non-count noun such as *information* or *advice* as countable in and of itself and produce such utterances as **informations* or **advices*.

It is important for ESL/EFL learners to gain an understanding of the distinction between count and non-count nouns because knowing which type of noun a given word is affects other sentence elements, such as verbs, determiners, and quantifiers.

What else do I need to teach my ESL/EFL learners about nouns?

Look at the following sentence:

> Michale Chiarello was introduced to flavored **oils** in the kitchen of his *nonna*, who would put a spoonful of olive **oil** infused with dried tomatoes in her tomato sauce. [Gugino, S. (2006, November 30). Tastes: Flavored oils. *The Wine Spectator,* p. 19.]

You may be wondering why *oil*, which is generally categorized as a non-count noun, has a countable counterpart, *oils*. This is an example of what we can call a *crossover noun.*

What is a crossover noun?

3.2.3 Crossover Nouns

The term *crossover noun* refers to nouns that have both count and non-count meanings. In the sentence above, *flavored* ***oils*** refers to different oils that are flavored by a variety of herbs and spices. *A spoonful of* ***oil*** refers to the general liquid and is preceded by the quantifying phrase *a spoonful.*

Similarly, when we refer to *gas* as in *The car needs gas,* we are using this noun in its non-count sense. When scientists refer to the different types of this substance, they talk about *gases* and use this noun in a count sense as in the phrase *the gases surrounding Jupiter*.

In short, a crossover noun is a count noun when used to describe **members** of a set, category, class, or group. It is non-count noun when used in its **general sense** to name a set, category, class, or group.

Does this explanation cover all examples of crossover nouns?

In some instances, non-count nouns and count nouns may have somewhat different meanings. Speakers may refer to the metal *iron* and be using the word in its non-count sense; however, when they press their clothes, they use *an iron*, which is a count noun.[1]

Is it easy for ESL/EFL learners to understand crossover nouns?

- ***Learner difficulties***

The difficulty with crossover nouns for learners is that while the grammatical explanations governing count versus non-count usage may be clear, the actual use of count and non-count nouns may be more difficult. With practice, ESL/EFL learners can usually grasp the idea of such countable items as *chair, table,* or *sofa* as concrete things comprising part of the non-count category *furniture*. They can usually also understand that a sign in the supermarket advertising *chicken* refers to a type of food while a picture of a barnyard will show the individual creature (*a chicken*).

It becomes more confusing for learners when they encounter less commonly used crossover nouns. While crossover nouns are generally not a concern for beginning- or intermediate-level ESL/EFL learners, as these learners become more proficient and encounter more sophisticated vocabulary, they will encounter more crossover nouns. To take one example, *yarn*, when referring to the material, is a non-count noun, but its use to describe a type of entertaining

[1]Although this meaning of *iron* has little in common with the metal, the count noun is derived from the fact that the original tool for pressing clothes was made of iron.

story or tale is less common. This count meaning of *yarn* is not obviously related to the non-count meaning, even though speakers may refer to the idiom *spinning a yarn,* which has historic roots in the non-count meaning.

Discovery Activity 4 practices distinguishing count, non-count, and crossover nouns. As you complete this activity, think about using the different words in different contexts. The answers are in the Answer Key.

Discovery Activity 4: Count and Non-Count Nouns

Look at the series of nouns:

sense coffee hair concern music thunder experience

1. Which ones are only non-count nouns?
2. Which ones can be used as both count and non-count nouns?
   - Discuss whether or not they have different meanings if they have both count and non-count uses.
   - Discuss which phrases could before any of the non-count nouns to make them countable.

   Example: bread

   - non-count noun
   - We can say *a loaf* or *loaves of bread* to refer to one or more units.
   - We can also say *a slice* or *slices of bread* to refer to individual pieces of bread.
   - *Bread* can also be used as a count noun and made plural: *That bakery sells breads from around the world;* in this example *breads* refers to the different types of bread baked in different countries.

3.3 Section 3: Structure Words that Signal Nouns

3.3.1 Noun Signals

There are certain words that precede nouns and therefore act to signal a noun. In this next section, we will consider some of the structure class words that signal nouns. We begin with articles, then turn to demonstratives, and conclude with quantifiers. All three types of noun signals are often classified as *determiners*.

3.3.1.1 Articles: *the, a, an*

English has two articles, *the* and *a/an.* When articles combine with nouns, they form *noun phrases*:

Article	+	Noun	=	Noun Phrase
a		cat		a cat
an		elephant		an elephant
the		creature		the creature

Definite article *the*

English has one definite article: *the*. This definite article signals a noun and tells us that a specific noun is being referred to. It does not refer to something general. For example, compare these two sentences:

We like movies.
We like *the* movies at Cinema 20.

In the first sentence, we do not put *the* before *movies* because we are referring to movies in the general sense of a type of activity we enjoy. In the second sentence, we use *the* before *movies* because we are referring to the specific type or genre or selection of movies shown at this movie theater.

The may be used with a singular or plural noun. It may be used before singular count nouns to refer to a type of person or a thing in general when referring to a category or type. *The* is also used with certain place names such as *the United States, the City of New York, the University of South Florida, the Golden Gate Bridge,* and *the Library of Congress.*

Try Discovery Activity 5 and see how well you do in recognizing the function of *the*. Discuss your answers with your classmates.

Discovery Activity 5: *the*

Describe how *the* functions in the following excerpts:

A.

The boys met **the** professor outside **the** main door of **the** Bristol Library at five p.m., as they usually did. All three of them were hungry, so they went to **the** center of town to find a restaurant. [Bellairs, J. (1990). *The secret of the underground room* (p. 62). New York: Puffin Books.]

B.

The computer is to **the** typewriter what **the** typewriter was to **the** pencil.

Indefinite article *a/an*

English also has an indefinite article that speakers use when referring to something that is not specified, vague, uncertain, or undefined. It is used with a singular count noun.

This indefinite article has two forms, depending on the initial vowel *sound* of the word following the indefinite article. If the noun or adjective begins with a vowel sound, then we use the form **an** as in ***an*** *icicle* or ***an*** *early meeting*. If the word begins with a consonant sound, we use the form ***a*** as in ***a*** *cup* or ***a*** *happy girl*.

It is important to point out to ESL/EFL learners that the initial letter of the word does not necessarily indicate that the word has a vowel or consonant sound. Consider these words:

hour herb home horse

All four words are written with an initial *h,* which is not pronounced in all of them. In *hour* and *herb*, the *h* is not pronounced in American English and must therefore be preceded by *an*. *Home* or *horse*, on the other hand, are both written and pronounced with the initial *h* consonant.

At lower levels of proficiency, ESL/EFL learners need to practice distinguishing between words spelled with a vowel but pronounced with a consonant sound (e.g., *university, one*) so that they can correctly choose between *a* and *an*. While they may make some errors in choosing between *a* and *an*, especially as beginning language learners, these are not major errors. The next Discovery Activity focuses on a greater concern for ESL/EFL learners: When do we use articles and for what purpose?

Discovery Activity 6: Articles

Look at the following excerpt.

> To drive a nail, hold it upright and tap it gently with a hammer, then take your hand away. Holding the hammer near the end of its handle, simply lift it, swinging your forearm from the elbow and let the weight of the head drop the hammer. [Reader's Digest. (1973). *New complete do-it-yourself manual* (p. 23). Pleasantville, New York: Reader's Digest.]

1. Underline all the articles (*a, an, the*). Explain the use of each article.
2. Discuss whether or not you could substitute one article for another (e.g., use *the* in place of *a*/*an*).
   - If yes, discuss how the meaning of the sentence would change.
   - If no, discuss why you cannot substitute one article for another in this instance.

Discussion: Discovery Activity 6

This excerpt is from a how-to guide. Since the intent is to explain home repair and maintenance procedures, the selection begins with non-specific, general reference to the things used (*a nail, a hammer*) in hammering a nail:

> To drive a nail, hold it upright and tap it gently with a hammer, then take your hand away.

Once reference has been made to something, it becomes a specific or definite thing in the mind of the speaker:

> Holding the hammer near the end of its handle, simply lift it, swinging your forearm from the elbow and let the weight of the head drop the hammer.

If this "something" has different parts to it (e.g., *hammer*), then these parts are also something specific or definite (e.g., *the end of its handle*).
Because this how-to guide is explaining to the reader how to accomplish a particular task, *the* is also used before anything belonging to the reader's body used in this task (e.g., *the elbow)*.

In this selection, substituting *a* or *an* for *the* would sound strange to a native speaker because of the reference to specific things.

This doesn't seem that complicated, so why do many ESL/EFL learners have problems with articles?

To answer this question, compare the use of the articles *a/an* and *the* in Discovery Activity 6 with their use in the following sentences:

> **A** collection of lines in **an** image can narrow **the** odds even further. For example, **a** set of parallel lines or near-parallel is seldom **an** accident. Nonparallel lines in **the** world rarely project near-parallel lines in **an** image. [Pinker, S. (1997). *How the mind works* (p. 244). New York: Norton.]

In the first sentence, *a* and *an* can be replaced with *the*, although the meaning changes:

> **The** collection of lines in **the** image can narrow **the** odds even further.

Now, rather than referring to any collection or any image, the writer has a specific collection and image in mind, possibly those found on the page of the text in which this passage appears.

In the phrase *the odds*, *the* cannot be changed because *the odds* is a set expression or idiomatic phrase, adding another potential area of confusion to language learners.
We can also change the next sentence:

For example, **the** set of parallel lines or near parallel is seldom *an* accident.

Notice that *the* can replace *a* before *set,* changing the meaning from general to specific. In the next part of the sentence, we cannot change *an accident* to *the accident* because there is no previous reference to make that accident a specific one. Let's now see how we might change the last sentence:

Non-parallel lines in **the** world rarely project near-parallel lines in **the** image.

As in the previous sentence, *the* can replace *a* before *image* in this new context. *The world,* cannot, however change to *a world*. Here, from a native speaker's perspective, there is a particular world, that is, *the* world in which we live. For non-native speakers of English, particularly for those whose languages do not have articles, this is often a difficult perspective to comprehend and internalize.

Discovery Activity 6 and this discussion illustrate the complexity of information an ESL/EFL learner must keep in mind when trying to use articles correctly—not an easy task, especially when the learner's language does not have articles.

Are articles only used with count nouns?

So far we have seen examples of article use with count nouns. For non-count nouns, we can also use an article, but only *the:*

I want fruit.
I want *the* fruit by that sign.

In both sentences, *fruit* is a non-count noun. The first sentence does not include *the* before *fruit*, but the second sentence does. Why is this?

In *I want fruit*, the speaker is referring to the general class or category known as *fruit*. The speaker is using *fruit* in a generic sense. In *I want the fruit by the sign*, the speaker is not referring to any fruit in general but specifying a particular kind or instance of this category, namely *the fruit by the sign*.

- ***Learner difficulties***

Article usage is particularly difficult for ESL/EFL learners whose native language does not have articles, such as Chinese or Russian. These learners face the greatest difficulties in correct article usage in English since they must learn to understand both the concept of articles as well as the nuances and subtleties of article usage. Such learners have great difficulty, even at the most advanced levels, in choosing which article to use in which situation.

There are many books that offer detailed rules governing the use of articles, but learners often find these confusing and hard to learn. Offering learners frequent opportunities to practice the use of articles in a variety of contexts and to discuss their difficulties with them when they make repeated errors of the same type can help learners improve their use of articles.

3.3.1.2 Demonstratives: *this, that, these, those*

Demonstratives are another group of words signaling nouns. Demonstratives precede nouns and indicate relative location or position. The class consists of four words: *this, that, these,* and *those*. The choice depends on two factors:

- Is the noun singular or plural? (Non-count nouns, since they have no plural forms, can only take the singular demonstratives *this* or *that*.)
- How far or close is the noun relative to the speaker's mental and/or physical perception?

When speakers refer to *this book,* they are generally thinking of one book (as opposed to several or many books) physically close to them or of one book in particular which they have been reading or discussing. When speakers refer to *this idea,* they are referring to a mental distance. When speakers refer to *those houses*, they are referring to houses farther away, either physically or mentally.

In addition to referring how far or close something is in the mind of the speaker, demonstratives can also refer to time, to preceding text, and to a new entity.

Discovery Activities 7 and 8 practice demonstratives. The first, Discovery Activity 7, is easier and uses teacher-made sentences. A discussion follows this Discovery Activity. The second Discovery Activity is more difficult since it uses authentic excerpts.

Discovery Activity 7: Demonstratives

Look at the sentences.

1. Underline the demonstratives *this, that, these,* and *those*.
2. Discuss the use of *this, that, these,* and *those*.

(a) I enjoyed reading this book by Brown, but I didn't really like that other one by him because I didn't think the ending was very good.
(b) Those boys hanging out by the supermarket are not nearly as friendly as these boys are.
(c) Two women looking at the web page of new movie trailers on the IMDB website:

Olivia: Have you seen this new movie? (pointing to one trailer)
Norah: I haven't seen it, but I saw that other movie with Keira Knightly.
(pointing to a different trailer)

Discussion: Discovery Activity 7

Sentence a
The speaker is differentiating between two things, one physically closer than the other one by *this* and *that*.

Sentence b
The speaker is again indicating relative physical location of two groups of people by the use of *those* versus *these*.

Sentence c
Olivia uses *this* to identify the particular trailer she is looking at.
Natalie uses *that* to indicate a different movie trailer on the same web page.

In Discovery Activity 7, the use of the demonstratives can be easily explained by the notion of distance. Things that are close to the speaker are referred to as *this* (singular) or *these* (plural). Things that are farther away from the speaker are referred to as *that* (singular) or *those* (plural). This is the type of explanation generally presented to low-level language learners and certainly quite effective in that it can be easily demonstrated visually.

As learners become more proficient in English, they need to become aware of the metaphorical uses of these demonstratives. Frequently, they are used to refer to *mental* or *perceived* distance, which refers to the distance in the mind of the speaker. Since this is a psychological reference, it is a subjective type of distance and one that can be more difficult for learners to grasp.

Discovery Activity 8 is more challenging than Discovery Activity 7. For Part I, the answers are in the Answer Key. For Part II, compare your answers with those of your classmates.

Discovery Activity 8: More with Demonstratives

Part I

1. Look at the excerpts and underline the demonstratives *this, that, these,* and *those*.

A.

College does seem to have a substantial net effect in the area of critical thinking. However, research on that topic has often not been controlled for age. [Abbott, A. (2003, October). The Zen of education. *The University of Chicago Magazine, 96,* p. 54.]

B.

"There's no telescreen!" he could not help murmuring. .."Ah," said the old man, "I never had one of those things." [Orwell, G. (1949). *Nineteen eighty-four* (p. 82). New York: Signet.]

C.

"Who wants these little pains? We all have them and we'd all be rid of them if we could. By all means, let's go to this woman if she's here, and those guards let us pass. [Ishiguro, K. (2015). *The buried giant*. New York: Knopf.]

D.

> Winston came across to examine the picture. It was a steel engraving of an oval building with rectangular windows, and a small tower in front.. "I know that building," said Winston finally. [Orwell, G. (1949). *Nineteen eighty-four* (p. 83). New York: Signet.]

Part II

Look at the demonstratives you underlined.

2. Discuss the use of *this, that, these,* and *those*.
3. Compare the use of *this, that, these,* and *those* in this activity with their use in Discovery Activity 7.
   - Could you explain the demonstratives in the same way? Explain why or why not.

3.3.1.3 Quantifiers

Quantifiers are the last group of words preceding nouns that we will examine. Quantifiers function to indicate a general number or quantity. They include words such as *some, many, much, few, a few, little, a little, a lot of, no,* and *less*. When we talk about *many books*, we are talking about a large number of books rather than a small number. When a speaker says, "*I have less time than I thought,"* the hearer knows that this person is referring to a small quantity or amount of time.

Some quantifiers, such as *many* or *fewer,* can only be used with count nouns and others, such as *much* or *less,* can only be used with non-count nouns. Still others, such as *some,* can be used for plural count nouns or non-count nouns.

This next Discovery Activity asks you to decide on the grammaticality of sentences with *much* or *many* and to think about why you made the decisions you did. The answers for this Discovery Activity can be found in the Answer Key at the end of the chapter.

Discovery Activity 9: *much, many*

Look at the following sentences.

1. Label the sentences that sound ungrammatical to you with an asterisk (*).

   (a) The Botanical Garden has many flowers from all over the world.
   (b) Did it take much effort to collect these flowers?
   (c) Much of the plants were donated by collectors.
   (d) Many time has been devoted to gathering the plants and flowers.
   (e) Has the Botanical Garden received many support from the town?
   (f) It is encouraging that many people support the gardens.
   (g) Much dollars have been raised during the fundraising campaign.

2. Look at all the sentences you considered grammatical that contain *many*.

   - What kinds of nouns follow *many*?
   - What grammatical feature(s) do they have in common?

3. Look at all the sentences you considered grammatical that contain *much*.

   - What kinds of nouns follow *much*?
   - What grammatical feature(s) do they have in common?

4. Revisit all the sentences.

   - What generalization can you make about the use of *many* and *much*?

- ***Learner difficulties***

For ESL/EFL learners, the correct use of *much* and *many* requires understanding the concept of count versus non-count nouns and knowing which noun belongs in which category. The problem is compounded by the fact that *much* and *many* occur far less frequently than do *a lot of* or *lots of*, both of which can be used with count and non-count nouns.

Earlier in this chapter we posed the question of why the distinction between count and non-count nouns is important for ESL/EFL learners. As our exploration of different noun signals in Sect. 3.3 has demonstrated, certain structure words accompany either count or non-count nouns. Understanding this distinction helps learners make appropriate language choices.

We now turn to the last part in this chapter, Sect. 3.4, in which we examine pronouns.

3.4 Section 4: Pronouns

The most common definition of a pronoun is a word that replaces a noun or noun phrase. A noun phrase includes a noun and all of its modifiers. These modifiers include determiners and adjectives:

Noun Phrase + Verb	**Pronoun + Verb**
Jerry reads.	→ **He** reads.
The boy reads.	
The little boy reads.	
The happy little boy reads.	
The very happy little boy reads.	

As we see here, these noun phrases, regardless of the number of words, can be replaced by the pronoun *he*.

Discovery Activity 10 asks you to change noun phrases into pronouns (the answers can be found in the Answer Key). This is a teacher-made activity with no authentic excerpts, so you may find it very easy. If you are sure you know what noun phrases are and do not feel you need this activity, continue on to the next section.

Discovery Activity 10: Pronouns

Look at the following sentences.

1. Underline the noun phrases.
2. Substitute a pronoun for the underlined noun phrases.

(a) Lauren was married yesterday.
(b) The bride was elegantly dressed.
(c) The lovely white gown looked stunning.
(d) The nervous bridegroom wore black.
(e) The younger sisters and brothers were excited.
(f) A cousin was the flower girl.
(g) A well-organized, lavish reception was held later.
(h) My mother, my father, my older brother, and I were invited.

3.4.1 Types of Pronouns

What are the different types of English pronouns?

There are several different types of pronouns, each type serving a different function in the sentence. In this section, we will look at four types of pronouns: subject, object, possessive, and indefinite.

3.4.1.1 Subject Pronouns

In Discovery Activity 11, you replaced all the noun phrases with *subject* pronouns. Pronouns that are found to the **left** of the main verb are called subject pronouns because they tell us who or what the doer of the verb is, or who or what is described by the verb.

Subject Pronouns	
singular	**plural**
I	we
you	you
he, she, it	they

In English we use eight subject pronouns, although there are only seven different pronoun forms. The 2nd person pronoun *you* can refer to either a singular or plural person; context indicates whether the singular or plural pronoun *you* is intended. Again, we see that in English form does not equal function.

In southern regions of the United States many speakers frequently use *you all* or its contracted form *ya'll* as a 2nd person plural pronoun. Another dialectal variation for plural *you* found in some parts of the United States is *youse*. While *you all/ya'll* is an accepted variant in the American South, *youse* is considered non-standard and is a stigmatized form.

3.4.1.2 Object Pronouns

Object pronouns are pronouns that replace nouns or noun phrases in the object position in the sentence. Object position means that the noun or noun phrase receives the action of the verb. Compare the following:

Sentence	Description of Noun Phrase	Discussion
The girl reads.	**noun phrase** in *subject* position	*The girl* is subject of verb *reads*
She reads.	*subject* pronoun	*The girl* refers to single female person, so subject pronoun is *she.* The noun phrase *The girl* answers the question *Who reads?,* a question that helps tell us who (or what) the subject of the verb is.
The girl reads **books**.	**noun phrase** in *object* position	*books* is object of verb *reads.*
She reads **them**.	**pronoun** in *object* position	*books* refers to a plural object, so the object pronoun is *them.* The noun phrase *books* answers the question *What does the girl (or she) read?*, a question that helps tell us what (or who) the object of the verb is.

Like the subject pronouns, there are eight object pronouns, although there are only seven different forms. The object pronoun *you* is the same for both singular and plural. The subject and object pronouns *you* and *it* are identical in form, although not in function.

Object Pronouns	
singular	**plural**
me	us
you	you
him, her, it	them

Because *you* and *it* have the same pronoun form in both subject and object positions, low-proficiency ESL/EFL learners sometimes become confused as to the function of these two pronouns.

3.4.1.3 Possessive Pronouns and Possessive Adjectives

Possessives comprise a third group of pronouns. This group is generally divided into two subgroups, based on the function of the possessive pronouns in a sentence. The first subset is generally known as *possessive adjectives* and the second set as *possessive pronouns*.
Possessive adjectives and possessive pronouns are similar because they both refer to possession or ownership. The distinction between the two groups lies in what does or does not follow. Possessive adjectives are followed by a noun or noun phrase. They form *part* of a noun phrase:

This is **my** *book.*

Possessive adjectives do not replace nouns or noun phrases. In the sentence, *This is my book, my* is modifying or describing something about *book. My* is not replacing *book*.

Possessive pronouns stand alone. Like any pronoun, possessive pronouns replace a noun or noun phrase:

It is **mine.**

In this sentence *mine* replaces the noun phrase *my book* in the previous sentence.

Possessive Adjectives	Possessive Pronouns
my	**mine**
your	your**s**
his	his
her	her**s**
its	its (rare)[a]
our	our**s**
their	their**s**

[a]*Its* as a possessive pronoun is rare, occurring primarily in expressions with *own* (e.g., *The robot developed a mind of* ***its own***)

Use Discovery Activity 11 to practice distinguishing between the possessive adjectives and the possessive pronouns. The answers are at the end of the chapter in the Answer Key. If you are comfortable in your ability to distinguish them, proceed to the next section.

Discovery Activity 11: Possessive Adjectives Versus Possessive Pronouns

Look at the following sentences.
The **possessive adjectives** are **bolded**.
The **possessive pronouns** are *italicized*.
Compare the underlined and italicized words in Group A and in Group B.

- How are they similar?
- How are they different?
- Why do you think they are considered two subsets within the same category?

Group A	Group B
I like **my** car.	I like *mine.*
You lost **your** book.	You lost *yours.*
The man sold **his** computer.	The man sold *his.*
That woman knows **her** priorities.	That woman knows *hers*.
That dog hurt **its** paw.	————
We want **our** share.	We want *ours.*
They forgot **their** appointment.	They forgot *theirs.*

Why do ESL/EFL learners have difficulties with possessive adjectives and possessive pronouns?

- ***Learner difficulties***

For learners of English, difficulties in the use of possessive adjectives and possessive pronouns arise for several reasons. First, there are the similarities in form between the subject and object pronouns. The possessive pronouns and the possessive adjectives are also similar in form, which often make them confusing for ESL/EFL learners.

Second, English pronoun forms distinguish between gender when the pronoun refers back to a female or male subject. In *Amanda sees her brother* or *Tom brought his friend*, the possessive adjectives *her* and *his* refer to *Amanda* (female) and *Tom* (male) respectively. In some languages where all nouns have gender, the possessive adjectives and pronouns change according to the noun they are modifying or replacing and not to the subject as in English. Contrast these English and French sentences:

Amanda sees **her** *book*	Amanda = female person
	The pronoun *her* agrees with *Amanda*.
Amanda voit **son** *livre*.	*livre* = masculine noun
	The pronoun *son* agrees with *livre*

Learners whose native languages have patterns similar to French may have trouble choosing the correct possessive adjective form in English.

3.4.1.4 Reflexive Pronouns

Reflexive pronouns are somewhat different from the pronouns we have explored up to now because reflexive pronouns do not substitute for a noun or noun phrase. Instead, reflexive pronouns are generally used to refer back to the subject:

The actress admired *herself* in the mirror.

Reflexive pronouns are also be used for emphasis:

I myself would never do that.
I would never do that *myself.*

When using a reflexive pronoun for emphasis, it can immediately follow the subject as in the first sentence or come at the end, as in the second sentence.
In addition, when a reflexive pronoun is used with *by,* it usually means on one's one, alone, or independently:

Joe can't answer the question by *himself*.

What are the forms of the reflexive pronouns?

The reflexive pronouns vary according to person and number (singular/plural):

Reflexive Pronouns	
I	**my**self
you (singular)	**your**self
he	**him**self
she	**her**self
it	**it**self
we	**our**sel**ves**
you (plural)	**your**sel**ves**
they	**them**sel**ves**

The singular forms all end in *–self;* the plurals in *–selves.* Note that there are two forms for *you* in the reflexive: the singular *yourself* and the plural *yourselves.* This is one instance where English does make a distinction between the singular and plural *you.*

What kinds of difficulties do ESL/EFL learners have with the reflexive pronouns?

- ***Learner difficulties***

Less proficient learners, particularly those who speak languages that do not have the same pronoun distinctions as English, often confuse the use of the object pronoun and the reflexive pronoun, producing such sentences as:

*She looked at *her* in the mirror.

3.4.1.5 Indefinite Pronouns

Indefinite pronouns comprise another subclass of pronouns. These pronouns are called indefinite because they do not refer to something or someone known or specific. Some grammar books call these pronouns compound pronouns because they are formed with two words:

Indefinite Pronouns			
	–body	**–one**	**–thing**
some-	somebody	someone	something
any-	anybody	anyone	anything
every-	everybody	everyone	everything
no	nobody	no one[a]	nothing

[a]Note that *no one* is the only indefinite pronoun spelled as two words.

Indefinite pronouns take the singular 3rd person verb form, as in this article title:

> Is Anybody out There? Detection devices are in the works for rooting out extraterrestrial life [Brownlee, C. (2006, January 21). *Science News, 16*(3), 42.]

Or as in the song title by Citizen:

> *Everybody Is Going to Heaven*

And in this quote from the action video game series *Assassin's Creed*®:

> "Nothing Is True, Everything Is Permitted."

In prescriptive, formal English, these indefinite pronouns when followed by a possessive pronoun take a singular form. As we discussed in Chap. 1, under the most traditional rules of formal English, the "correct" singular possessive pronoun has been the masculine form, *his*. With the movement toward more inclusive language, there has been acceptance of the use of *his or her* or *his/her,* and even *their* to avoid the awkwardness of using both singular forms. In everyday spoken and less formal written forms of English, the indefinite pronouns have long been followed by the more neutral plural possessive form *their*.

- ***Learner difficulties***

Native speakers and ESL/EFL learners both have difficulty with singular possessive pronoun, although for different reasons. Generally, native speakers require specific instruction in the use of the singular pronoun after the indefinite pronouns in formal English. Because English is a relatively gender-free language, there is a (natural) preference to use the gender-neutral plural form.

For ESL/EFL learners, confusion in the use of possessive pronouns with indefinite pronouns is part of the general difficulties they have with pronoun usage. In addition, learners exposed to casual spoken English may become confused between what they hear and read, and what they may have been taught in terms of appropriate or correct pronoun usage with indefinite pronouns.

For both ESL/EFL learners and native speakers, it is important to draw a distinction between informal and formal language, whether written or spoken. In addition, for test-taking purposes, learners should be aware of "correct" pronoun usage.

3.5 Summary

Nouns

To identify nouns we use:

- semantic clues
- structural clues
- morphological clues

There are three types of nouns:

- count
- non-count
- crossover

Two functions of nouns discussed in this chapter:

subject	**Cats** meow. **Students** study all night long.
direct object	Meg likes **books**. They have done **their assignment**.

Pronouns

Singular					
	subject	**object**	**possessive adjectives**[a]	**possessive pronouns**	**reflexive pronouns**
1st person singular	I	me	my	mine	myself
2nd person singular[b]	you	you	your	yours	yourself
3rd person singular, masculine	he	him	his	his	himself
3rd person singular, feminine	she	her	her	her	herself
3rd person singular, neuter	it	it	its	(not used)	itself
Plural					
1st person plural	we	us	our	ours	ourselves
2nd person plural	you	you	you	you	yourselves
3rd person plural	they	they	they	they	themselves

[a]Remember that although technically possessive adjectives are not pronouns, they are generally classified and taught together with the possessive pronouns because of their closely related function, meaning, and forms.
[b]No change except for reflexive

Determiners

Determiners tell us:
• how many or which items the noun or noun phrase is referring to.
• signal that a noun or noun phrase is following.

articles	the, a/an
possessive adjectives	my, your, his, her, its, our, their
demonstrative adjectives	this, that, these, those
quantifiers	some, many, much, few, a few, little, a little, a lot of, no
ordinal numbers	one, two, three, fifteen, forty, one hundred

Common Types of Non-Count Nouns[a]

abstract	information, advice, help, homework, love, hate, health, behavior, work, patience, experience, fun, beauty, democracy
solids	bread, meat, pasta, ice cream, cotton, silk, wool, iron, wood, glass, chalk, soap, detergent, butter, margarine, yogurt, cheese, chocolate, garlic, mustard, marble
liquids	oil, vinegar, soup, water, milk, coffee, juice, wine, beer, shampoo, conditioner, lotion, gasoline, blood, fuel, honey
grains/powders	rice, cereal, wheat, flour, sugar, salt, pepper, curry
gases	air, oxygen, carbon dioxide, smoke, smog, steam
classes or categories	furniture, food, fruit, luggage, baggage, mail, transportation, jewelry, trash, equipment
weather	weather, rain, snow, sleet, hail, ice, fog, haze, wind, thunder, lightning, sunshine, humidity
fields of study	linguistics, education, mathematics, engineering, biology, chemistry, informational technology, business, psychology

[a]Some of these may be crossover nouns (e.g., *democracy*, *meat*)

3.6 Practice Activities

Activity 1: Nouns and Verbs

The words below can function as both nouns and verbs.

1. Write pairs of sentences contrasting their use.
2. Explain the clues we can use to help determine the function of the words in your sentences.

Example: badger

A *badger* lives underground.
Parents sometimes mother *badger* their children to clean their rooms.

In the first sentence, *badge*r is a noun. There are two clues that *badger* is being used as a singular noun and that it is in subject position: the article *a* before *badger* and the position of *badger* before the verb *lives. A badger* is a noun phrase.

In the second sentence, *badger* is a verb. It is to the right of the subject noun phrase, lives, in the sentence position usually occupied by a verb.

Note that another clue here is the inflectional *–s*, which is attached to present tense singular verbs in English. Although this –s inflection could be confused with the plural *–s* inflection, the placement of *badger* in a sentence helps determine that it is a verb.

Now you try this activity with the following words:

(a) fall
(b) mail
(c) time
(d) drink
(e) color

Activity 2: Articles

Part I

1. Read Excerpt A and Excerpt B.
2. Underline the articles, *a, an,* and *the* in the two excerpts.
3. Discuss whether or not you could substitute one article for another, for example, can you use *the* in place of *a/an*?
   - If yes, discuss how the meaning of the sentence would change.
   - If no, discuss why you cannot substitute one article for another in this instance.

A.

There's much you can do to keep the plumbing in your home functioning well, as this chapter shows. Beginning with an overall description of a home plumbing system, the chapter goes on to describe the basics of repair and maintenance, showing how to deal with everything from a leaky faucet to an overflowing toilet. [Reader's Digest. (1973). *New complete do-it-yourself* (p. 197). Pleasantville, NY: Reader's Digest.]

B.

. . . lines that are parallel in the world, such as the edges of a telephone pole, almost always project near-parallel lines. So if there are near-parallel lines in an image, the odds favor parallel edges in the world. [Pinker, S. (1997). *How the mind works* (p. 244). New York: Norton.]

Part II (optional follow-up)

4. What similarities and/or differences do you see in the use of articles in Excerpts A and B?
5. What do you think would be difficult for learners of English whose native language does not have articles?
6. Discuss how you might use an excerpt such as one of these for teaching purposes.

Activity 3: Count, Non-Count, and Crossover Nouns

As you have seen in this chapter, nouns in English can be classified into two broad categories, count and non-count nouns.

1. Discuss how you might explain the difference between count and non-count nouns to ESL/EFL students at a low to intermediate level of proficiency.

2. There are also many nouns in English that are crossover nouns. These are nouns that have both count and non-count meanings.

   (a) In a Word document or on a sheet of paper, make three columns. Label the first column **Count Nouns,** the second column **Non-Count Nouns**, and the third column **Crossover Nouns.**
   (b) Look at the nouns below and put each one into the appropriate column.
   (c) For those nouns you listed under the column **Crossover Nouns**, discuss the differences between the count and non-count meanings.

experience sense poverty idea fear chalk flour foliage anger difficulty concern blood skylight happiness time

Activity 4: More on Nouns

The sentences in the excerpts below include count, non-count, and crossover nouns.

1. Underline the nouns in the excerpts.
2. Label the count counts with **C**.
3. Label non-count nouns with **NC**.
4. Label crossover nouns with **CR**.
5. Discuss why you identified some of the nouns as **CR.** Be specific and provide examples.

Example:

CR **C**
Emotions, in particular, are often governed by cultural expectations.

Emotion is a crossover noun. When we talk about the general category of strong feelings, *emotion* is non-count noun. When we refer to specific strong feelings such as love, hate, or anger, *emotion* is a count noun. A clue that helps identify the count usage in this sentence is the plural *–s* ending of *emotion**s***.

A.

Unlike turkeys, chickens are not native to North America. However, they were easily transported from Europe and became a staple food in early settlements like Jamestown in Virginia. Ubiquitous and easy to raise, chicken became an important part of the Southern diet. [The World of Food. (2006, September 30). *Wine Spectator, 31*(8), p. 68.]

B.

Like Italian food, Italian olive oil is distinguishable by region. Oils from Tuscany are considered the benchmark. [The World of Food. (2006, September 30). *Wine Spectator, 31* (8), p. 100.]

C.

Spain produces an extraordinary range of wines. [The World of Food. (2006, September 30). *Wine Spectator, 31*(8), p. 108.]

Activity 5: Error Analysis

The following excerpts were written by learners of English. There are **four** types of errors in each paragraph:

(a) article usage (*the, a/an*)
(b) quantifiers (*much* vs. *many*)
(c) singular vs. plural
(d) personal pronoun use

Ignore ***any other* errors**, even though this may be difficult. Focus only on the four types of errors listed above.

1. Underline and correct each error you find.
2. Compare your responses with your classmates.

When you compare your responses with other native or near-native speakers, you may find some disagreement. For example, native speakers do not always agree in their use of *the*. This underscores again that the use of *the* is difficult for ESL/EFL learners.

Example:

Today there is the e-mail and the snail mail.
Today there is *the* e-mail and *the* snail mail.

In this sentence, the learner is adding the article *the* before a non-count noun that is being used in a very general or generic sense.

A.

Snail mail is the nickname of regular mail. In the recent years more and more people use the e-mail. There are advantage and disadvantage of e-mail. Unfortunately, the e-mail also has it bad points because the senders can never send gifts or touchable stuffs to your friend and family.

B.

Working women in America face much kind of problems. The pressure from work affects her families. The women don't have as much opportunities as the men do. Men have the more opportunities in the workplace. And the women earn fewer money. But American women have much kind of pressure from work and from her families. The American women must take care of her children and do many houseworks when she gets home from his job.

C.

I think there are numerous benefits to traveling in groups with a tour guide. There is many informations about new places, but I need a specific one. Tour guides can give me good advices. People who want to travel alone should have many experiences about traveling before traveling alone. I don't have experiences, so I don't prefer to travel alone.

3.7 Answer Key

Discussion: Discovery Activity 3

Possible expressions of quantity include:

- a pound of
- a slice of
- an ounce of
- a sheet of
- a cup of
- a piece of
- a bit of
- a great deal of
- a blade of
- a strand of

Note that not all in the above list work with all the different non-count nouns in the activity. For example, *a strand of* may be used with *hair* but not with *butter*.

Discussion: Discovery Activity 4

- *Sense, hair, concern,* and *experience*: both count and non-count. When used as count nouns, they refer to individual faculties, pieces, items, interests, or events, as in:
  Pam has an acute sense of smell.
  The sentence refers to Pam's ability to smell.
  Pam has a sixth sense about trouble.
  The sentence refers to an additional (psychic) sense to people's five senses (see, smell, hear, touch and taste).
- *coffee:* also both count and non-count. It has become common for speakers to use such expressions as *a coffee*, *two milks*, or *three sugars*. These expressions have become a shorthand for underlying longer expressions that include the actual descriptive phrases making them countable:

  a cup of coffee → a coffee
  two containers of milk → two milks
  three packets of sugar → three sugars

- *music:* non-count; may be used with a noun phrase such as *type of music* or *piece of music*.
- *thunder:* non-count; may be used with noun phrase *clap of* as in *I heard a clap of thunder*.

Discussion: Discovery Activity 5

Excerpt A

the before *professor*, *main door*, and *center of town* serves to identify each specific or particular noun.

- When the author refers to *the professor*, he is referring to a particular professor, one of the main characters of the book, and not just any person who happens to be a professor.
- *The main door* is a specific door in the author's (and reader's) mind.
- *the Bristol Library* is an example of *the* + place name.
- *the center of town* refers to the specific part of town in which the story is taking place.

Excerpt B

the before *computer, typewriter*, and *pencil* serves to identify these nouns as the labels or names for different types or kinds of items.

- *The computer* and *the typewriter* refer not to a specific computer or typewriter but to a specific kind of machine.
- *the pencil* refers not to a specific writing instrument but to a specific kind of writing implement.

Discussion: Discovery Activity 8

Excerpt A	
that	refers to previously mentioned topic from which writer is distancing self, mental distance
Excerpt B	
those	refers to telescreens, items speaker feels outside of or far away from own personal experience
Excerpt C	
these pains	refers to pains which speaker identifies as part of own current experience
this woman	refers to person recently identified or mentioned
those guards	refers to guards at physical distance from speaker and companion
Excerpt D	
that building	reference similar to Excerpt A, where speaker referring to perceived mental distance

Discussion: Discovery Activity 9

English uses *much* with non-count nouns and *many* with plural count nouns. Sentences (c), (d), (e), and (g) are ungrammatical because they violate this rule. In Sentences (c) and (g), *plants* and *dollars* are plural count nouns and need to be preceded by *many*. In Sentences (d) and (e), *time* and *support* are non-count nouns and need to be preceded by *much*.

Consider:

The Botanical Gardens has *many* flowers. The Botanical Gardens has *a lot of* flowers.	*flowers* is a count noun. Use ***many*** or *a lot of*
Did it take *much* effort to collect these flowers? Did it take *a lot of* effort to collect these flowers?	*effort* is a non-count noun. Use **much** or *a lot of*

In spoken English, native speakers prefer *a lot of*. ESL/EFL learners often find it easier to use *a lot of* rather than *much* or *many* since *a lot of* can be used for either count or non-count nouns. In formal writing, *a lot of* is considered informal and generally avoided.

Discussion: Discovery Activity 10

(a) *Lauren* was married yesterday.
She
(b) *The bride* was elegantly dressed.
She
(c) *The lovely white gown* looked stunning.
It
(d) *The nervous bridegroom* wore black.
He
(e) *The younger sisters and brothers* were excited.
They
(f) *A cousin* was the flower girl.
She
(g) *A well-organized, lavish reception* was held later.
It
(h) *My mother, my father, my older brother, and I* were invited.
We

A pronoun may replace a single noun as in Sentence a), but it also may replace noun phrases (see Chap. 8). As Sentences b through h illustrate, regardless of how long the noun phrase is, it can be replaced by a single pronoun. This type of pronoun is called a **subject** pronoun because it is the subject of the verb of the sentence.

Discussion: Discovery Activity 11

The underlined possessive adjectives in Group A are part of noun phrases. They are describing, or modifying, the nouns they precede.

Since the italicized words in Group B replace noun phrases, they are possessive pronouns, with one exception in Group A (*That dog hurt **its** paw*). Here, the possessive adjective *its* has no corresponding possessive pronoun form. *Its* as a possessive pronoun is rare and is primarily used when *its* is followed by *own: The horse needs a stall of its own; Sometimes I think my computer has a mind of its own.*